

## George's Helping Hands

**Adam Versényi**

I first met George in the early 1980s not in person but via correspondence. I was a graduate student in Dramaturgy and Dramatic Criticism at the Yale School of Drama with a newfound interest in Latin American theatre and vague ideas about how I could incorporate that interest into my own theatre practice. I had stumbled across this publication called *Latin American Theatre Review* and wrote to the name listed as “editor” on the masthead, filling my letter (yes, it was an actual letter) with my own inchoate musings about the nature of Latin American theatre, requests for advice, and a plea for the names of people in the area that I could work with since no one at the Drama School had the faintest notion about Latin American theatre practice. George responded with a long letter of his own, seriously considering and critiquing my ideas, and generously offering both advice and other contacts, all of which I would soon come to recognize was characteristic of the man I valued as a colleague, a mentor, and a friend. It was only later as I proceeded to become more knowledgeable about the field that I realized I had pestered one of the most important figures in it. Beyond a marker of George’s ever present modesty, this is important, for both George’s generosity of spirit and his willingness to seriously engage with a complete stranger, a first-year grad student who wasn’t his own, and, furthermore, working in a different discipline than his, is emblematic of the kind of impact George had on my own theatre practice and that of others. Since that first contact George was instrumental in myriad other ways: publishing some of my first work as a critic, recommending me for a Fulbright to Colombia after I finished my M.F.A., suggesting publishers for my first book; but what I think was most important was that first contact when he simply helped. Looking back I now see that all through my training at Yale, and during my subsequent career as a professional dramaturg, it is this aspect of George that I have striven to

emulate and that has enabled me to formulate my own personal definition of the dramaturg as “someone who helps others do their best work.” On a larger scale, what George accomplished with *LATR*, by traveling throughout Latin America, and by publishing not only scholarly articles, but also performance reviews and interviews with professionals from around the region, was to expose Latin American theatre practitioners themselves to each other’s work when travel to see that work was difficult, if not impossible, thereby helping them to grow as artists. Artists thrive by being challenged by others’ work. All good artists also steal. They take other people’s ideas, filter them through their own sensibility, and make them their own. George made that possible for artists throughout the Americas. Theatre is inherently a collaborative form. You put the brightest, most talented people you can find into a room together and help them unleash their creative energies to jointly forge something new. George wasn’t a theatre professional but, whether through the journal, the LATT gatherings, or his teaching and mentoring, he understood the dynamics of theatre practice. Thanks for helping, George.

*The University of North Carolina  
Dramaturg, PlayMakers Repertory Company*